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Hybrid and Experimental Nature of Postmodern Art and Contemporary Critical Theory:

Emergence of Book Illustrations and a Fresh Perspective for Literary Critics.

Abstract: Illustrated fiction is a hybrid narrative medium in which images and text work together to tell a story. It can take various forms and includes any fiction or non-fiction work written for adults or children and includes magazines, graphic novels, comic strips, and picture books etc. All the picture book genres are given scholarly attention in contemporary times not because it has a childhood form and genre, but rather it has matured into adult fiction to become a dynamic creative hybrid that embodies many codes, textual devices and inter-textual references that push at the boundaries of convention. Mainstream comic industry skillfully combines visual and verbal elements to tell rich and compelling stories gravitating around issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. There are some recent publications of Book illustrations like 'Sea Prayer' which was written as an ode to Syrian war refugees and is sensitive in nature and emotionally very compelling and there are countless comic adaptations of classic texts such as 'To Kill A Mocking Bird' that revolve around themes of racism and discrimination and also some phenomenal short stories of past e.g. 'Metamorphosis' that is also available in Graphic Novel format , craftfully underscoring a strong philosophical message. The new hybrid genre is famously called as graphic novel, is a great success and kindly acknowledged by both the authors and readers. At the same time new theories like

literary Darwinism and cognitivism have raised the status and credibility of Hybrid and Experimental Art to a degree , never known before .All these developments in the previously juvenile genres are sufficient to imply that boundaries and differences between different forms and genres are blurring and gaining tremendous popularity among writers and readers and I have tried to study this against the background of Social Evolution and Cognitive theory of perception and thus tried to give Literature a touch of Science.

Keywords: Adaptation, Cognitivism, Hybridity, Illustrations, Literary Darwinism, Psychological Evolution

1. Introduction

Pop culture no longer relies on immediacy of pleasure and satisfaction through “Art & Entertainment” in contemporary times. Pop is becoming tangibly experimental as it must be successful on a commercial scale .This itself is dependent on the attitude and reception from the audience . Sectors of old and high culture have also adopted instruments of Pop for mass familiarity. Vindicating Pop Culture , Postmodern theorists have shunted the idea of segregation and “marking boundaries” as it poses a threat to Social democracy and leads to categorization of Art and also such radically heterogeneous nature of Postmodern Art is not a matter of surprise anymore .Postmodern Literature embraces hybridity with much enthusiasm .

Complex narrative forms emerge in response to growing social anxiety and out of the necessity to capture complex forms of experience. New hybrid genres and media also modify the ways we see the old, presumably homogeneous and non-hybrid phenomena. Thus hybridity affects our perception and the way we think . (Grishkova).

Theorists of literary Darwinism and evolutionary psychology also state; that by refining and strengthening our sociality, by making us readier to use the resources of our imagination, and by raising our confidence in shaping life on our own terms, literature fundamentally alters our relation to the world.(Owen)

Arts, literature, and other aesthetic systems fostered by productive creative impulses fashion society's "radical imaginary". Cognitivism and visual thinking also played an important role in the acknowledgment of complex Hybrid Artistic forms such as Graphic Novels , Illustration Books and Photo Novel where human perception plays a key role as suggested by Arnheim's theory of visual thinking ,where visuals are fundamentally ingrained in Knowing and thus ,“mental,verbal and graphic cannot be neatly separated”. (qtd in Grishkova).

2. Metamorphosis of Book Illustrations through The Literary History

Book Illustrations have existed since the advent of written words and even before that; ancient scripts had existed in pictorial forms known as pictographs. With the advent of printing, the culture of hand painted illuminations had declined and towards the end of the fifteenth century wood-block prints were a replacement for them. Modern Book illustrations have their origin in these Block books. “Biblia pauperum” (Pauper's Bible) just looked like the medieval graphic novel. The text and the illustration were cut on the same block .Etching and engraving were some other illustrating techniques in sixteenth and seventeenth century. Actually it was, Thomas Bewicks ingenious work of Book engravings and Senefelder's; Lithography that stimulated the growth and progress of Book Illustrations. (“Questia”)

Even before the golden era of Charles Dickens began; the period when the Book Illustrations had reached its zenith, I would like to mention the phenomenal Romantic poet, William Blake

who at the same time was a brilliant illustrator of his own poems and produced the original manuscript in the pictorial form.

In the twentieth century Dicken's works were illustrated successfully by HK. Brown (phiz). Phiz's visual interpretation of character became as important as the description of Dickens. Sir John Tenniel's, illustrations for "Alice In The Wonderland" are as much remembered as the text itself.(Russel)

Today most of the brilliant illustrations are done in the field of Children's Literature. The trend for the popularity of illustrations shifted after a brief period of twentieth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century , the Aesthetic Movement of Art had raised a strong banner against the intermingling of pictures with the literary texts as it was considered as a big obstacle in the way of aesthetic endeavours of an artist and thus publication of the texts with visual representation were not encouraged and declined as childish in nature ; a kind of low art which writers dismissed as impure in nature as their conviction was that the written words should be powerful enough to create a mental picture and their graphical representations diminished the Artistic caliber of the work . But a change might be noticed to have come with popularity of Virgil Finleys captivating illustration for a low brow sci-fi magazine 'The Conquest Of The Moon Pool'.(Russel)

The metamorphosis of graphic novels into a serious genre has also increased the arenas for illustrations. Will Eisner's Contract with the God, Art Spiegelmans': "Maus" and Frank Miller's, "Batman: The Dark Knight Return were a major turnover for the revival and huge demand of Illustration works. Postmodernism is also open to the juxtaposition of illustrations and literary texts and is theoretically quite involved with this kind of collaborative experimenting and innovation. Postmodern literature often goes for recycling of past styles and themes in modern day context and fundamentally believes in breaking the past dichotomy and barriers between the high and fine Arts or low and popular culture. Postmodernism has already

embraced hybridity as the roots of the word roots lay in the revolt and resistance for any kind of fixidity and determinancy. Postmodernism believes in flexibility of Art.

3. Postmodernism, Hybridity and an Era of Crossover Fiction

Postmodern art is known to be complex and eclectic. .It takes up different genres of artistic technique and relishes in juxtaposing these varied elements. This practice is known as kitsch (ironic) and involves deliberate parodying, pastiche and caricature of the old forms, styles, genres and institutions that appeared to be fundamental and rigid in nature. Postmodern art uses pastiche and parody even to comment on the original piece of art that it itself represents for the first time. Literature has also combined features and techniques of previous genres and styles in a similar fashion and thus new narrative voices and styles get created giving a new lease of life to the previous ones and simultaneously breaks the monotony of Art. Abstract Hybridization is a fundamental trait of postmodernism and is included by Hassan amongst his famous “catena” or “features” of postmodern texts. Postmodernism takes under its fold all the hitherto disparaged categories known as “Threshold literature” or “Para literature” which is at once old and at once young. (Hassan 503,506)

Contemporary mainstream fiction writers often switch to experimental hybrid styles and modes of creation and take upon unconventional formats which include genre blending and crossing. Crossover literature is an extensive body of diverse, intergenerational works with a very long history as earlier mentioned .Thus borders between children's and adult fiction have also become more porous, or even non-existent .

While almost every genre can cross age boundaries, the novel, and in particular the children's and young adult novel, has won all the attention. Genres such as short fiction, fairy tales, fantasies, graphic novels, picture books, and comics commonly transcend age boundaries. Crossover literature transcends the conventionally recognized boundaries within the fiction

market and thus blurring the borders between adult literature and children's literature. Books may cross from child to adult or adult to child audiences, or they may be explicitly published for both audiences. Crossover literature is by no means a recent phenomenon, but it received an enormous of media attention with the unprecedented success of J. K. Rowling's fantasy fiction "Harry Potter books" in the late 1990s. It was at that time that the term "crossover" was adopted by critics, media and publishing houses. Post-structuralism has already given a clean chit to such radical crossover in form and style by contemporary authors.

Derrida was himself quoted to say , "Text cannot belong to no genre .It cannot be without or less a genre .every text participates in one or several genres .There is no such thing as genre less text and yet a text does not belong to any one category"(qtd.in Beckett)

4. Literary Darwinism and Reader Response: A New Perspective on Radical Experimenting With Style & Form

Literary Darwinism is based on the premise that human mind has evolved to form an adaptive relationship with its environment and tries to characterize the different phenomena of a literary texts (tone, form, style, theme) against a broader socio-cultural context and then comprehends and understands various aspects of these located texts in time within the vortex of psychological and biological facts and generalizations and thus tries to determines an implied reader and author e.g. Some Darwinists have proposed scientific explanations for formal literary features, including genres. Poetry has been attributed to a biologically based human tendency for reproduction and imitation of singing birds, a behavior often professed for calling their mates, the poetic metres to the fixed intervals and regularities of pattern in the functioning of biological organisms and fundamental genres like tragedy, comedy ,romance and satire to human emotions of fear, joy , love , contempt . Tragedy is also associated with status conflict and comedy to mate selection. The satiric dystopian novel has been explained

by contrasting the universal human needs and oppressive state organization. Historical, technological, cultural, political and economic factors interact with evolved features of human nature in different ways in each story Genius emerges in a perfectly natural way through a Darwinian process of generating, selecting and regenerating, cycle after cycle, in both culture and in the efforts of the individual artist, so the improvement upon the genres may be a consequence of a process of natural selection and imitation that evolutionary science proposes.

(Boyd)

Darwin lays out an array of aesthetic capacities by drawing upon a neo- aesthetic tradition that classifies “pleasure” hierarchically, elevating secondary pleasures i.e. imagination, moral ideas, etc. above primary ones like appetites and needs. Darwin reasons that cultivated beings categorize and also evaluate their pleasures, whereas lower beings do not. Apparently Darwinism also tries to score a point about appreciation of Art with the rise of intellect of society. Darwin even includes bodily functions with thoughts and feelings amongst actions that cannot be described merely as voluntary muscular movements ; to be in health, internal organs require moderate, rather than violent stimulation, and in turn this supports the physical and mental wellness of a being ; underlying a positive social action. Darwin takes up the concept of “voliation” that is emotional response given by an external stimulus or the man’s environment to a level of a literary theory

Sensibility like “aesthetics” has also undergone an abstraction from its original, literal meaning before it came to describe right perception i.e “a whole way of perceiving and responding, not to be reduced to either ‘thought’ or ‘feeling’, in the similar manner of transformation and transmutation of one organ or species into something different or better which is necessary for human evolution.

As technologies of representation advance, Art also ‘imitates’ the biological functioning of human eye: for example, representation through print and visual media enables the human empire to reproduce itself in even far-distant realms. “the possession of clear ideas acquired by our superior sense of touch, and afterwards of vision, distinguishes man from brutes, and has given him the empire of the world, with the power of improving nature by the exertions of art” (Infante-Abbatantuono)

As contemporary Pulp fiction is evolving significantly both in themes and in its structure, the aim of Literary Darwinism at the level of interpretive criticism can be to situate any given text or set of texts in relation to the pressure points in human nature. They can identify the biological forces that are invoked or repressed in any given work and can assess how those forces impinge on meaning and form. The interpretive efforts open a new range of aesthetic sensations and comparative analysis for the Darwinian critics.

The governing terms for critics in such analysis are the urgent needs and driving forces in life-survival, reproduction, kinship, social affiliation, dominance, aggression, and the needs of the imagination .Physical realities and the rhythms of the life cycle shape the analytical criterion through which Darwinians make sense of literary depictions. The basic pattern of human life, its history and structure in socio-biological terms is a reality shared by all authors and readers. Differences in the way any given author envisions that life history are essential to the imaginative qualities that distinguish the author, and those differences enter minutely into the subtlest nuances of tone, style, and formal organization. An evolutionary perspective can thus provide a comprehensive framework for comparing the perspectives of authors, the organization of meaning in texts, and the responses of readers. We cannot isolate Literary studies

from psychological and historical generalizations .The resistance for this new approach was considered to be a misleading stance; towards being compared with established facts and evidences from other disciplines. Literary critics cannot ignore the factual regularities of human psychology which they must consider while giving a critical opinion. But if they don't want to be completely dependent on other fields as a consequence of this comparison that also demands an initiative from literary critics. A substantial number of literary scholars have made some efforts to incorporate empirical methods from the social sciences. A smaller number have made efforts to adopt to these empirical methods. Literature and its oral antecedents derive from a uniquely human, species-typical disposition for producing and consuming imaginative verbal constructs. Removing the methodological barrier between humanistic expertise and the expertise of the social sciences can produce results valuable to both the fields which cannot be possible only by a singular discursive methodology. (Carrol)

Evolutionary Psychologists have thrown gauntlets against relativism and social construct theories. They believe in common human nature inscribed at a genetic level that does more to shape human nature and the society. So an author's imagination is a trait that makes him unique and have a visionary perspective on common history and life. His different and insightful attitude gets projected through the creation of complex narrative forms and this complexity keeps on evolving as the history and context gets changing and such works also change the disposition of the readers and affect them deeply. Brian Boyd's; On The Origin of Stories, is probably the best single work of literary Darwinism and he has said “ literature refines and strengthens our sociality and also makes us readier to use our imaginative resources and raises our confidence to live life on our own terms and alters our relation to the world and may become thus a contributing factor in the ‘survival’ process.”(qtd. in Owen 125)

Thus when readers are appreciating experimental and innovative cross literatures and cross-genre, it may be the result of the evolution of the intellect in a manner which adapts with the fundamental changes in the system as it is no hidden fact that we are becoming multicultural and dynamic with time. We live in a context where we cannot escape the continuous shuffle and jumble of visual effects into our daily lives and this has happened affectively through the popularity of akin to life Cinema,TV and speedy digitization and thus we have evolved and adapted to accept such hybrid and heterogenous texts like graphic novels ,picture books etc which seems to be more engaging to the eyes and mind and also proper genres in such times, inundated with visual effects and hyper-reali

5. Cognitivism and Hybrid Texts

Some critics often raise the issue of dualistic thinking or a consequent psychological conflict associated with the hybrid nature of Postmodern Art. Radical hybridity and intermixing may lead to a disharmony and disturbance in human imagination and in the case of Graphic Novels or Book Illustrations can be best defeated. Arnheim ,the distinguished psychologist, philosopher and critic describes Graphic Novel as a composite , sequential Artistic medium which is a well nested system ,where all the elements like panels; the lines ,the color and shapes of objects ,images ,dialogues ,color and hue of each page, the resonance and contrast are in dynamic inter -relationship to form a harmonious whole .This indeed helps the author to make an emphasis on the unvoiced elements of the text for the readers and thus falls in line with the much revered Gestalts theory of visual perception .(Greg m. Smith, chap12 ,arheim and comics)(Rudolf ARheim) Areheim for film and media studies) ed.Higgins, Scott ,Taylor and Francis e-library,2010,pp.214-226

Gestalt theory has already established the fact; that the operational principle of the brain is holistic and human brain does not perceive an objects in parts but as a unified whole.

Grishakova argues that complexity theories widely used in social sciences, suggest a possibility to avoid dualistic thinking as it offers a flexible, conceptual framework for Comparative literary studies.

Complexity theory aspires for a systematic analysis of a structure or an organization, where all the constituents are adaptive in nature and both the individual and collective behavior of the constituents mutates and self-organizes corresponding to a change initiating an event or a collection of events. Complexity theory fundamentally tries to understand the non-linear and uncertain nature of literature and figures out the universals, to deduce the diverse and heterogeneous literary forms as similar in nature. But its application is visible to a lesser extent, in literary and cultural studies

Aesthetic systems, as part of society's "imaginary," respond to, and reorganize in response to, impulses received from other domains, but also modify their environments and forge new imaginaries. Complex narrative forms emerge in response to growing social anxiety and out of the necessity to capture complex forms of experience. Fictionalized representations filter into nonfictional genres and vice versa and new generic repertoires germinate in the intermediary generic zones. New hybrid genres and media have modified the ways we see old, presumably homogeneous and non-hybrid phenomena. With this perspective, "hybridity" is also a stimulus and a sign of a perceptual and epistemological shift rather than of passing fashion. According to Arnheim, cognition, rather than being a separate process of mental knowing, is ingrained in perception. Arnheim's theory of visual thinking contributed to the acknowledgement of the fact that different types of imagery (mental, verbal, graphic) cannot be neatly separated: rather than being an "impure," secondary effect of reading, mental imagery is an integral part of verbal experience and called as 'intermedial' by Griashkova. If new narrative and generic forms foster exchange and propagation of new "hybrid" concepts such as Graphic novel, photo novel, docufiction, or cybertext, we are still operating with dualistic vocabularies and binary oppositions

such as literature/media, verbal/visual, fiction/nonfiction, local/universal on the larger level e.g Bakhtin , the pioneer of “hybridity” classifies the linguistic hybridity into two types . The first being unconscious and organic which is a result of continuous history and evolution and another is intentional for artistic accomplishments and is called intentional hybridity e.g when numerous discourses, cultures, linguistic forms and styles, intersect, merge and cross each other in a Literary text to create a hybrid effect the aim of the author is to give insights with the help of these diverse elements that illuminate and support each other. But how do we categorize such textual hybrids where visuals are involved and classifying it in either of the two, reaffirms the “Literary Binarism” which postmodernism tries to negate.(Grishakova)

Bakhtin himself explains the ephemeral nature of fixed division between the two hybrid states and Grishkova has already used the word “Intermedial” for this .By placing the cross-genres against the continuous and organically evolving history naturally homogenizes the mixing and blending of diverse media, which simultaneously is as experimental and heterogenous as the intentional hybridity.

According to Goldstone, “the term postmodern picturebook refers to the non-traditional plot structure and non-linear format employed by a sophisticated group of postmodern or contemporary authors and illustrators”.

According to Hunt, “Book illustrations are not known for its childish mode of representation as of now but rather a scholastic work of literature that embodies many codes, textual devices and inter-textual references that push at the boundaries of convention” .Nodelman aptly reasons out the power of picture books lays in the interdependent relationship, the visual images and texts share, to define and amplify each other and thus creates clearer meaning for the reader (qtd. in Thompson)

6. Critical Assessment and Reviews of Some Recent Illustration Books in The Mode Of Contemporary Postmodern Fiction

Graphic novels which are so popular can be a perfect medium to create reasonable political and social constructs and critical understanding right from the bottom level. These genres resonate with strong cultural voices and do not hesitate to include most sensitive of themes such as racism, violence, abuse, oppression, migration crisis and even the themes with a philosophical bent.

Khalid Hossaini's Sea Prayer is a slim and skillfully wrought picture book that flows from the heart, mourning a city reduced to rubble and a childhood lost to war, while sending up a prayer that heaving waters will deliver a child to safety. It was released amid the onslaught of heart-wrenching news about emigration and written in a letter format, a father speaking directly to the son, gives the text a poignant immediacy. The appeal of "Sea Prayer" grows manifold with the marvellous illustrations of Dan Williams. The water colors capture the spirit of the story in their dainty strokes, blurred outlines and eclectic colours fading into monochromes towards the climax; like life coming to a standstill after wobbling on the pulsing veins of promise. And in this poignant account, Hosseini brings to fore, in restrained luminosity, the plights of parents under such calamitous skies. With artistry and heart he illuminates the refugees in Sea Prayer not as "illegals" or faceless migrants, but as fathers and sons from a beautiful, culturally rich country who love their families like we love ours and who are only pulling up stakes because they have to. They are parents and children who have no better choice than to leave everything they have in hopes of staying alive. (Das)

Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize winning 'To Kill A Mocking Bird " is America's most celebrated classic novel in recent times and now even published in the Graphic Novel format rekindling memories amongst the readers . This thoughtfully crafted interpretation of Lee's classic illustrated by Fred Fordham. Reintroduces readers to the Finch family: scrappy, outspoken

Scout; her daring older brother, Jem; and Atticus, their defense attorney father and the book's moral compass. Decades-old tensions ramp up in their small Southern town when Atticus defends a black man accused of raping a white woman. Even the local recluse, Boo Radley, isn't free from the repercussions of the trial. Fordham visually establishes the world of Maycomb County, with all its unspoken laws pertaining to race, class, and family and also with a sure hand. What stands out, upon seeing Scout and her entourage of free-ranging children in all their ragtag physicality, is that a world of children exists alongside the adult world: equally complex, populated by rumors about "hot steams" (ghosts) and poisoned pecans, yet also wild with possibility. Fordham's character drawings have an appropriate vintage look, and he chooses the right moments to slow down or pan out. The nighttime panoramas of the mysterious Radley residence are lovely and moody, and Fordham's sun-dappled days, blue-gray evenings, and sepia courtroom scenes are shown muted and muffled just by strokes of everyday generic fonts. More like a loving remake than the revelation, Fordham's adaptation does sufficient justice to Lee's portrait of injustice.

Acclaimed graphic artist Peter Kuper presents a brilliant, darkly comic reimagining of Kafka's classic tale of family, alienation, and a giant bug; In "Metamorphosis". Kuper's electric drawings, which merge American cartooning with German expressionism brings Kafka's prose to vivid life, reviving the stories original humour and thus adapting the philosophical account into a revitalized form in the most exciting manner possible. .

"A brilliant illustrated adaptation of Franz Kafka's famous story. It's a real pleasure to read and one in which everyone will recognize the existential drama and uncanny wit of the original text. (Bernstein)

Bubbling beneath the surface is a caustic batch of black humor that is as much unsettling as it is absurd. This is the magic of Kafka and Kuper gives it a postmodern edge here, with an intriguing dance of picture and text" (qtd. in Gannet news Service).

7. Conclusion

Such bold experiments with old classics and critically acclaimed fiction by the writers, who usually dealt with mature thoughts and sensitive issues and their novel experiences with hybrid forms of representation is quite evident from above stated reviews. Themes like racism, migration, dystopia, war trauma etc in the recently resuscitated picture book genre, has tried to disseminate knowledge and progressive thoughts amongst all sections of society. The scholarly graphical representations of literary texts has therefore liberated and emancipated the Art as its wings have spread and catered to the tastes of variety of readers among all age groups and thus is highly multicultural in nature. Critically acclaimed and intellectual stuff, is no longer having a limited access like just attending to the demands of privileged or highly learnt sections of the society. Art has democratized in this way. The paper has justified how a liberally heterogenous genre does not seem to be least unnatural, inappropriate or impure by virtue of the society that is evolving and has a dynamic relationship with its environment. Both writers and readers are situated in a highly digitized context and this plays an important role for the adaptation of readers with this new trend of visual-textual intertwining suggestive of an era of tremendous flexibility and malleability. Both Blake and Browne see picture books as a route to appreciating art, as well as stories. "The illustrations in children's books are the first paintings most children see," Browne writes, "and because of that they are incredibly important. What we see and share at that age stays with us for life." Eccleshare says; "these pictures act like an evocative scent, or Proust's taste of the madeleine, thrusting us back in time. Taking even the oldest reader straight back into the essence of their own childhood. (qtd. in The Guardian).



MEDIEVAL BLOCK BOOKS

Image from Kafka's Metamorphosis; A Graphic Novel



When she met no resistance, her attention was aroused. . . .



William Blake's Poem 'The Lamb' From Songs of Innocence



Harper Lee's Graphic Novel "To Kill A Mockingbird"

“Sea Prayer” By Khalid Hossaini



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